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STUDY GUIDE
TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES

A FILM BY PATRICIA RIGGEN
LA MISMA LUNA
APRIL 3, 2008
ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

PATRICIA RIGGEN, DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

Patricia Riggen was born in Guadalajara, Mexico where she studied communication sciences. Her academic experience led her to an early career in journalism, working on several newspapers with national circulation. In 1996, Riggen began participating in professional workshops in script writing and dramatic writing. This experience led her to write a dozen documentary scripts for Mexican television as well as several feature screenplays. In tandem with her scriptwriting, she became the production vice chairman for shorts at the Mexican Film Institute in 1997 and 1998, a period during which she produced or co-produced over 15 short films.

She later moved to New York City, where she received her master’s degree in directing and screenwriting at Columbia University. While at Columbia, she wrote, produced and directed two medium length films, THE CORNFIELD and FAMILY PORTRAIT. THE CORNFIELD, a beautiful period film shot in Mexico, won an Ariel (the Mexican equivalent of an Academy Award®) for Best Short Film, the Student Academy Award Gold Medal, the Student “Emmy” for Best Narrative, and the DGA Best Latino Director Award as well as 15 other awards in different countries. It has screened internationally on television, including on HBO in the US. Family Portrait, a documentary about poverty in Harlem featuring Gordon Parks, won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, among other awards. It is being distributed in the UK through the Independent Film Association and in the US and Canada through Direct Cinema LTD. UNDER THE SAME MOON is Patricia’s first feature film.

ABOUT THE FILM

UNDER THE SAME MOON (LA MISMA LUNA) earned a standing ovation at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival for its poignant, emotionally rich tale of a mother and son living on opposite sides of the U.S.-Mexico border connected by an enduring love. In her feature film debut, director Patricia Riggen weaves their parallel stories into a vividly textured tapestry of yearning and devotion that portrays a child’s courage and tenacity, and a mother’s sacrifice.

Nine-year-old Carlos aka Carlitos (Adrián Alonso, THE MASK OF ZORRO) is one of the countless children left behind by parents who come to the U.S. seeking a way to provide for their families. His mother, Rosario (Kate del Castillo, BORDERTOWN) has worked illegally as a domestic in Los Angeles for four years, sending money home to her son and mother to give them a chance at a better life.

When the death of his grandmother leaves young Carlitos alone, he takes his fate into his own hands and heads north across the border to find his mother. As he journeys from his rural Mexican village to the L.A. barrio, Carlitos faces seemingly insurmountable obstacles with a steely determination and unfettered optimism that earn him the grudging respect and affection of a reluctant protector, a middle-aged migrant worker named Enrique (Eugenio Derbez, PADRE NUESTRO).

The unlikely pair finds its way from Tucson to East L.A., but the only clue Carlitos has to his mother’s whereabouts is her description of the street corner from which she has called him each Sunday for the last four years. Unaware that Rosario is only hours away from returning to Mexico to be with her son, Carlitos and Enrique desperately comb the vast unfamiliar city for a place he has seen only in his imagination.
Many myths about immigration affect the nation’s perceptions about immigrants. Try to determine whether each of the following statements is fact or fiction.

**IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES IS GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE.**

**MYTH:** In 1910, immigrants made up nearly 15 percent of the U.S. population whereas in 1997, immigrants made up less than 10 percent of the population. Immigration was at its peak during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when Europeans arrived to work in the factories of the industrializing cities and the Western territories taken from the Native American tribes.

**REALITY:** From 1980 to 1990, the number of native household in poverty grew by 11 percent, while the number of poor immigrant households grew by 42 percent.

**IN THEIR LIFETIME, IMMIGRANTS PAY MORE IN TAXES THAN THEY RECEIVE IN PUBLIC SERVICES.**

**REALITY:** Welfare use among non-refugee immigrants is lower than among U.S. native-born citizens in the same age group (15-64). The 1990 census reported that 20.4 percent of immigrants were on welfare, compared with 26.2 percent of U.S. native-born citizens. In 1997, immigrants paid an estimated $133 billion in federal, state and local taxes. A typical immigrant and his or her offspring pay an estimated $80,000 more in taxes than they will receive in federal, state and local benefits over the course of their lifetimes.

**THE PERCENTAGE OF IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN POVERTY IS GROWING FASTER THAN THE PERCENTAGE OF NATIVE-BORN CITIZENS LIVING IN POVERTY.**

**REALITY:** From 1980 to 1990, the number of native household in poverty grew by 11 percent, while the number of poor immigrant households grew by 42 percent.

**MOST IMMIGRANTS COME TO THE UNITED STATES FROM ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA.**

**REALITY:** From 1900 to 1990, the proportion of immigrants from Asia and Latin America increased from less than 1.5 percent to 25 percent and 43 percent, respectively.

**MOST IMMIGRANTS COME INTO THE UNITED STATES ILLEGALLY.**

**MYTH:** Of the 20 million immigrants tallied in the 1990 census, only 15 percent were in the U.S. illegally. Although these figures do not account for some homeless immigrants and undocumented migrant workers, who return to their native countries when their seasonal work is over, the proportion of illegal immigrants to legal immigrants is still quite small.

**RECENT IMMIGRANTS TEND TO SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH IN THE HOME.**

**REALITY:** About 80 percent of newly arrived immigrants do not speak English when they are with their families. However, recent immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries become proficient in English at a faster rate than those from other countries where English is not the dominant language. About half of all recent immigrants report speaking English “very well” or “well,” despite the fact that some may not speak English in the home.

**MOST UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS ENTER THE COUNTRY ACROSS ITS SOUTHERN BORDER.**

**MYTH:** Most undocumented immigrants in the U.S. arrive legally on commercial carriers and then overstay their visas, or they come across the Canadian border. Despite this fact, the U.S. spends a disproportionate amount of money and resources enforcing the Mexican border. Most Mexican nationals in the United States are migrants, who take seasonal jobs and then return to their families in Mexico.

**UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT WORKERS TAKE JOBS AWAY FROM NATIVE WORKERS.**

**MYTH:** Studies show that undocumented immigration either has no effect on native workers or actually increases their labor market opportunities by boosting the industries that create new jobs. Undocumented immigrants often take jobs that others in the community refuse to perform. For example, the railroads across the West were largely built by Chinese immigrants, and large-scale agricultural production still relies on Mexican workers, many of whom are migrants, not immigrants.

**MEXICAN WORKERS HAVE BEEN INTERMITTENTLY WELCOMED IN THE U.S.**

**REALITY:** During World War I, Mexican workers were welcomed to the U.S. to help offset the wartime labor shortages. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, approximately a half million people were deported to Mexico, most of whom were U.S. citizens. This pattern has been repeated throughout history: immigrant labor is sought-after in times of expansion and condemned during economic instability.

(taken from pbs.org)
As citizens of the United States, we have a lot of resources and government enforced support and rights. Let's take a moment and think about some important things that illegal immigrants do not have access to, and see if you can remember moments in the movie when these issues became serious concerns:

**Driver's license**—Illegal immigrants do NOT have social security cards, so there is no way to for an illegal immigrant to obtain a valid driver's license. To get a driver's license in New York, you must present a social security card (in addition to other government-issued identification). A Social Security card is issued to citizens, permanent residents, and temporary (government-approved) residents.

**Health care**—Illegal immigrants can get emergency care through Medicaid (the federal-state program for the poor and people with disabilities). But they can't get non-emergency care unless they pay. Illegal immigrants are not eligible for most other public benefits. And using a health care facility means a serious risk of being reported to immigration services. They are ineligible for most other public benefits.

**Voting**—Illegal immigrants do not have the right to vote. This means that despite the fact that a large number of illegal immigrants are living and working in the U.S.—they do not have a say in electing officials that are fighting for (or against) legislation that will affect them heavily (i.e. bills drivers licenses or identification that will make life for them easier)

**Job security**—Illegal immigrants typically work long and hard for incredibly low wages. Ironically, most immigration helps Social Security's finances, because new immigrants tend to be of working age and contribute more than they take from the system—many illegal immigrants have payroll taxes deducted from their wages; but unlike legal citizens, they will never receive public pension in retirement or be eligible for Medicare.

**Police Protection**—Illegal immigrants cannot have their affairs settled through the police authority. Although confidentiality in reporting crimes is usually respected with illegal immigrants, it sometimes impossible for illegal immigrants to be guaranteed police protection because their illegal status is liable to get them into serious trouble, so many illegal immigrants refuse to report crimes done to them or their fears to the police because they fear it will hurt them more than it will help them.
Between 1990 and 2000, New York’s public school enrollment increased 14 percent.

31 percent of school-aged children in New York have immigrant parents. Seven percent of New York City students immigrated to the U.S. in the past three years.

In Queens, schools are scrambling for space for 30,000 additional students. “That’s almost exclusively driven by immigration,” according to Harold Levy, New York City’s school chancellor.

As fast as new schools are built, enrollment increases fill them up. New York City estimated it would be 22,000 students over capacity during the 2002 school year.

Over 1,600 classes in 400 public schools there violate city guidelines for overcrowding.

Many of the areas most affected by overcrowding are those that have experienced a large influx of immigrants in recent years.

“With too many students and too few classrooms, the principal and teachers at PS 112 in Long Island City make do,” reports Newsday. “The gym teacher shares his gymnasium with therapists for special-education students, so there isn’t enough space for basketball games. Upstairs, fifth-graders use a former boys’ shower as a storage room and hang their coats on the shower knobs. It would be shocking, if only it weren’t so commonplace in Queens, which has the most crowded schools in New York City, if not the nation. Queens needs another 30,000 new seats just to handle current students—before expected hikes in enrollment.”

More than 11,100 city classrooms are overstuffed—with 10,000 of them in high schools—a new teachers union survey shows. Queens’ high schools, where overcrowding has been a chronic problem, were the most packed on average. The union found 4,490 of Queens’ high school classes had more than 34 students—the cap outlined in the union’s contract with the city.

In the Orchard Park School District, some classes are held in school ticket booth and custodial closets.

(from fair.org)
Do you know anyone who is living in the U.S. illegally? If so (and no need to name names), what do you think was difficult for them. Does their life differ from yours? How?

It is easy to overlook one’s rights as a U.S. Citizen—what rights do you think you have in your everyday life that a person without citizenship or a green card would have?

At one point in the film, someone mentions that Latino people living in the US think that they are better than those who live in Mexico—why do you think that is?

What do you think about the two young people who carry Carlitos across the border? Why do you think that this is a big business?

Think about the tomato picking scene—why was Carlitos warned not to touch his face while working? Do you think that the worker who got chemicals in his eyes will be able to get medical attention?

Why was Rosario helpless when the woman that she cleaned house for fired her without paying her wages?

Can you list 5 five health risks in crossing the border illegally?
**How to Get Involved**

**Take Action**

Last year, hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants and friends of illegal immigrants marched on cities throughout the US—fighting for the rights of people who are not citizens, but live and work here. You too can help to build awareness about these issues. The New York Immigration Coalition (www.thenyic.org) often announces meetings and marches that you can be involved with.

**Write Letters**

There is a huge amount of governmental back and forth about how to address the “illegal situation”—write to your local congressman or senator expressing your views. Better yet, write a group letter and have everyone you know sign it.

**Become Informed**

Many people are against immigration to the US because they don’t know the true economic and social impact. Talk to people that you know to be immigrants about their lives and struggles. Read books on the subject. Watch films about it. Knowing more will help you to understand the true impact of the issues at hand.

**Organizations to Consider**

- **Unite Families**: A movement to unite lawful US permanent residents with their families.
  [www.unitefamilies.org](http://www.unitefamilies.org)
- **The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)** is an umbrella policy and advocacy organization for more than 200 groups in New York State that work with immigrants and refugees.
  [www.thenyic.org](http://www.thenyic.org)
- **FAIR** is the leading immigration reform organization in the US.
  [www.fairus.org](http://www.fairus.org)

**Further Watching**

- **El Norte**, Gregory Nava: After the army destroys their village and family, a brother and sister, teenagers who just barely escaped the massacre, decide they must flee to “El Norte”
- **Maria Full of Grace**, Josh Martson: In a small village in Colombia, the pregnant seventeen years old Maria decides to accept an offer to work as a drug mule, flying to USA with sixty-two pellets of cocaine in her stomach.
- **Dying to Get In: Undocumented Immigration at the U.S. Mexican Border**, Brett Tolley: An intimate perspective of border crossing and the people who cross. The U.S./Mexican border, dubbed a “gantlet of death” by documentarian Brett Tolley, is infiltrated first-hand in this gritty examination.

**Further Reading**

- **Teens writing about immigration**:
  [www.pbs.org/inthemix/shows/show_teen_immigrants5.html](http://www.pbs.org/inthemix/shows/show_teen_immigrants5.html)
- **Delfino’s Journey** by Jo Harper
  To escape oppressive poverty and an abusive household in Mexico, teenage Delfino and his cousin Salvador risk the treacherous Rio Grande and escape to America to find work.
- **Kids Like Me: Voices of the Immigrant Experience** by Judith M. Blohm
  26 personal narratives celebrate the experience of young people making a new home in a strange community—finding common ground as they make new friends, learn a different language, and share their unique cultural identities.